

Williams leads hit parade for Kernels

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 08 July 2014 22:06 -



J.D. Williams is a happy guy who always has a smile for everyone, but the Cedar Rapids Kernels outfielder was extra happy Tuesday.

Williams broke out of a slump and went 4-for-4 with a home run and four RBIs as the Kernels belted the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers, 15-5, before 2,424 fans at Veterans Memorial Stadium.

Cedar Rapids collected a season-high 19 hits and scored its second-most runs this year, trailing only a 16-run output at Beloit May 27.

Kernels relief pitcher Nick Burdi entertained the fans in the seventh inning with a 101 mph fastball and three strikeouts, a much-needed boost of confidence after walking four straight batters in his debut here last week.

Burdi hit 100 and 101 on the radar gun and had a dozen other pitchers that were clocked in the high 90's, a rare feat for a pitcher.

"That's part of my repertoire," he said. "I go out there and throw strikes and do whatever I can to help the team win."

Williams hit .281 with eight homers and 42 RBIs in 80 games for Cedar Rapids last year. That earned him a promotion to Fort Myers in the Florida State League and his career appeared headed in the right direction.

Williams got hurt in spring training this year and was shipped back to the Kernels, where he was

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struggling with a .206 batting average heading into Tuesday night's game. He raised his average to .230 with his 4-for-4 performance.

"It was definitely a good day. I definitely needed that," said Williams.

"I was pressing to do too much," he said of his slump, which included a 5-for-38 stretch in his previous 10 games. "Trying to get out of here (and promoted to Fort Myers again) is not important. It's important that I keep playing and keep playing, so I'm just trying to relax and work on a few things with Tommy today."

Kernels hitting coach Tommy Watkins helped Williams make a slight adjustment with his hands. It paid off with a two-run homer in the second inning, a single in the fourth, a walk in the fifth, an RBI single in the sixth and an RBI double in the eighth.

"So that worked out pretty well," he said. "I thank Tommy for that."

Williams had a big smile for his teammates after the home run, and they were equally happy for him. "I had been struggling pretty bad before today, so it's always good when you can get rolling again," he said.

"It was good to see him show some life tonight," said Kernels Manager Jake Mauer. "Hopefully we can get him hot again. It was great to see. He looked like the old J.D. tonight."

Burdi arrived in Cedar Rapids with great expectations after the Twins picked him in the second round from the University of Louisville, where he helped his club make the College World Series for the second straight year.

His first outing with the Kernels was a disaster, but he had a good outing in relief on the road and was able to show the home fans what he can do Tuesday.

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Burdi put his initial appearance with the Kernels in his rear-view mirror as quickly as possible.

"It happens," he said. "That's what baseball is. You have to let it go. You have to have that short-term memory.

"I came out to the field the next day and I had the same attitude. I went about my business of getting better. It's going to happen again," he said. "That's a reality. It's baseball and it's just part of the game."

Mauer liked what he saw of Burdi Tuesday. "Pretty impressive tonight," the skipper said.

Jake Reed, another new relief pitcher on the team, looked good in his debut for the Kernels. He pitched the eighth inning and was charged with an unearned run due to an infield error.

Kernels catcher Alex Swim went 3-for-5 and scored three runs, raising his batting average to .326. Tanner Vavra also had three hits. Ryan Walker, Mitch Garver and Bryan Haar had two hits apiece. Walker drove in four runs.

The Kernels and Wisconsin meet Wednesday night at 6:35. Mauer said Chih-wei Hu, a pitcher from Taiwan who joined the club this week, will be the starter Thursday night.

Mauer said infielder Logan Wade will be activated from the disabled list Wednesday and will replace Engelb Vielma on the 25-man roster. Vielma has been placed on the DL with concussion-like symptoms.

WISCONSIN (5): Garcia, cf, 5 1 0 0, McFarland, 2b, 5 0 2 0, Ratterree, rf, 3 0 1 1, Coulter, c, 4 1 0 0, DeMuth, 3b, 3 1 0 0, Brennan, 1b, 3 2 2 3, Neda, dh, 3 0 0 0, Pena, lf, 4 0 0 0, Ortega, ss, 4 0 1 0. Totals 34 5 6 4.

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KERNELS (15): Murphy, rf, 5 1 1 1, Walker, ss, 3 1 2 4, Christensen, 1b, 4 1 1 1, Garver, dh, 6 0 2 1, Haar, 3b, 5 1 2 1, Swim, c, 5 3 3 0, Kanzler, cf, 3 2 1 0, Williams, lf, 4 4 4 4, Vavra, 2b, 5 2 3 1. Totals 40 15 19 13.

Wisconsin 020 110 010 - 5 6 4

Kernels 120 432 03x - 15 19 3

Archer, Razo (4), Quintana (6) and Coulter. Thorpe, Bixler (5), Burdi (7), Reed (8), Boyd (9) and Swim. W - Bixler (5-4). L - Archer (3-4). 2B - McFarland (11), Kanzler (6), Murphy (5), Garver (18), Walker (4), Williams (10). HR - Brennan (10), Williams (1). E - DeMuth (1), Pena (2), Razo (1), Christensen (4), Vavra (8), Walker (5). A - 2,424.

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